

Message Text

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ACTION EA-12

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01
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FM AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9077
INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
AMCONSUL HONG KONG
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
AMEMBASSY PARIS
CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L VIENTIANE 0299

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: SCUL PEPR PDIP FR LA UR
SUBJECT: STATUS OF FRENCH AND SOVIET CULTURAL CENTERS IN LAOS

REF: VIENTIANE 250

1. A SENIOR FRENCH DIPLOMATIC SOURCE TOLD US FEBRUARY 27 THAT THE FRENCH CULTURAL CENTER IN VIENTIANE HAD CLOSED ITS DOOR "DEFINITIVEMENT", BUT THIS FAR "ONLY THE FRONT DOOR." MORE SPECIFICALLY, A SIGN HAS BEEN POSTED AT THE CENTER DOOR ANNOUNCING THAT "LE CENTRE CULTUREL EST FERME."
2. A NEW SIGN, HOWEVER, HAS BEEN PLACED ABOVE THE MAIN ENTRY WHICH IDENTIFIES THE FACILITY AS THE EMBASSY OF FRANCE'S "SERVICE CULTUREL ET DE COOPERATION TECHNIQUE." MOREOVER, INSTRUCTION OF FRENCH CHILDREN WILL CONTINUE, AND THE FRENCH CINEMA AND LIBRARY OF APPROXIMATELY
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29,000 VOLUMES WILL REMAIN OPEN FOR USE BY RESIDENT FOREIGNERS FOR THE TIME BEING.

3. THOUGH BOTH THE LPDR AND THE FRENCH EMBASSY APPEAR UNSURE ABOUT THE FUTURE OF FRENCH CULTURAL ACTIVITIES HERE, THIS MUCH IS CLEAR:
(A) THE MISSION WILL NOT BE PERMITTED TO HAVE ANY DEAL-

INGS WITH LAO NATIONALS.

(?) THE FRENCH MUST VACATE THE CURRENT FACILITY (WHICH USED TO BE USIA) BY JUNE 15.

(C) NO FRENCH INSTITUTION WILL BE PERMITTED TO OPERATE UNDER THE NAME OF THE "FRENCH CULTURAL CENTER" AFTER JUNE 15.

4. OUTSTANDING PROCEDURAL QUESTIONS FOR THE FRENCH INCLUDE:

(A) WILL "METIS" BE REGARDED AS LAO BY THE LPDR AND THEREFORE BE PROHIBITED FROM PARTICIPATING IN FUNCTIONS AT THE CENTER?

(B) WILL THE LPDR PERMIT THE CENTER TO REORGANIZE UNDER A DIFFERENT TITLE IN A DIFFERENT LOCATION AND TO OPERATE EXCLUSIVELY ON BEHALF OF THE SIZABLE FRENCH AND OTHER FOREIGN RESIDENT COMMUNITY?

4. THE SOVIET CULTURAL MISSION HAS ALSO BEEN ASKED TO SHUT DOWN ITS CULTURAL ACTIVITIES FOR LAO, ACCORDING TO SOVIET EMBASSY FIRST SECRETARY GUEORGUI KISSELOV. KISSELOV SAID FEBRUARY 28 THAT CLASSES FOR LAO AT THEAT THE CENTER HAD BEEN STOPPED, AS HAD MOVIES FOR THE LAO. MOVIES FOR DIPLOMATS, HOWEVER, WOULD CONTINUE.

5. KISSELOV SAID THAT SOVIET AMBASSADOR PODOLSKI HAD MADE NO PROTEST OR OBJECTION TO THE LAO ORAL REQUEST
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THAT THE CENTER SHUT DOWN ITS ACTIVITIES FOR LAO. POKOLSKI HAD ASKED, HOWEVER, THAT THE LAO GIVE HIM SOMETHING IN WRITING TO "SEND TO MOSCOW."

6. ANOTHER FRENCH OFFICIAL TOLD US MARCH 3 THAT THE PRC HAD RECENTLY REQUESTED TO OPEN A CULTURAL CENTER AND THAT THE LAO DID NOT WANT THEM TO DO SO. HE SAID THAT HE BELIEVED THAT THE LAO HAD MOVED TO SHUT DOWN THE FRENCH AND SOVIET CULTURAL CENTERS SO THAT THE PRC COULD NOT ESTABLISH A CULTURAL CENTER. A SECOND SENIOR FRENCH SOURCE ALSO INDICATED HIS BELIEF THAT RECENT LPDR RESTRICTIONS AGAINST FOREIGNERS (INCLUDING PROHIBITIONS ON FOREIGN SCHOOLS ABOVE THE PRIMARY LEVEL, SEE SEPTEL) WERE AIMED AT THE CHINESE AS MUCH AS THE FRENCH.

7. THOUGH THE FRENCH HAVE LONG EXPECTED THIS DEVELOPMENT, THE DEMISE OF THE LAST FRENCH CULTURAL MISSION IN INDOCHINA IS UNDOUBTABLE TRAUMATIC. IN ADDITION TO EMOTIONS AROUSED IN THE CLOSURE, THE INCIDENT RAISES THE DIFFICULT QUESTION OF NATIONALITY OF THE APPROXIMATELY THIRTY "METIS" CHILDREN WHOM THE FRENCH RECOGNIZE AS FRENCH AND THE LAO AS LAO. EITHER SIDE MAY

WISH TO MAKE AN ISSUE OF WHETHER THESE CHILDREN WILL BE
PERMITTED TO CONTINUE INSTRUCTION UNDER A POSSIBLE RE-
DEFINED FRENCH PROGRAM.

8. THE SOVIETS' QUIET ACQUIESCENCE TO THE LAO ORAL
REQUEST TO SHUT DOWN THE CULTURAL ACTIVITIES FOR THE
LAO MAY HAVE HAD LESS TO DO WITH SOVIET GRACE THAN WITH
THE FACT THAT THE SOVIET CENTER HAD NEVER ACHIEVED MUCH
POPULARITY HERE ANYWAY.
ROBERTS

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